

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 02961

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, SP
SUBJECT: GRIM MOOD IN BASQUE COUNTRY FOLLOWING PROHIBITION
OF ABERRI EGUNA

REF: (A) MADRID 835, (B) MADRID 2719

1. SUMMARY: GOS REFUSAL TO AUTHORIZE BASQUE CELEBRATION
OF ABERRI EGUNA (DAY OF THE FATHERLAND) AND FAILURE TO RE-
LEASE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS HAVE ENGENDERED A MOOD OF
BITTERNESS AND RENEWED SKEPTICISM IN BASQUE PROVINCES ABOUT
ITS DEMOCRATIC INTENTIONS AND FORTHRIGHTNESS. VIOLENCE
AGAINST ABERRI EGUNA DEMONSTRATORS AND SPECTATORS WAS MOD-
ERATE BY REGION'S STANDARDS BUT REFLECTS CONTINUING EX-
PLOSIVE POTENTIAL OF GOS/BASQUE RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. AMCONSUL BILBAO SPOKE WITH MEMBERS OF BASQUE NATIONAL-
IST PARTY (PNV) VIZCAYA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, INCLUDING
PARTY'S BEST KNOWN LEADER JAVIER ARZALLUS (SEE REF (A)),
FOLLOWING GOS REFUSAL TO AUTHORIZE MASSIVE PEACEFUL ABERRI
EGUNA DEMONSTRATION IN VITORIA AND SUBSEQUENT CLASHES
BETWEEN POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS THERE AND ELSEWHERE IN
THE BASQUE PROVINCES (SEE REF (B)). THEY EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN
ABOUT SPANISH GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS TOWARDS THE REGION AND WIL-
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LINGNESS TO PLAY FAIR IN THE COMING ELECTIONS. THEY BE-
LIEVE GOS DENIED PERMISSION FOR ABERRI EGUNA NOT FOR THE
STATED REASON OF FEAR OF EXTREMIST VIOLENCE BUT BECAUSE
IT COULD NOT TOLERATE THE IMPLICATIONS OF 200 TO 250 THOU-
SAND BASQUES PEACEFULLY ASSERTING THEIR NATIONAL IDENTITY,
ESPECIALLY IN ALAVA, WHICH WITH NAVARRA GOS STILL HOPES TO
SPLIT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY. (ALLEGEDLY,

VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA ARE ALREADY WRITTEN OFF TO BASQUE NATIONALISTS, BUT THE OTHER TWO BASQUE PROVINCES ARE ELECTORALLY UP FOR GRABS.)

3. PNV LEADERS ARE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT SPANISH DEMOCRATIZATION AND GOVERNMENT ABILITY TO KEEP ITS PROMISES. ON KEY QUESTION OF AMNESTY, THEY SAID THAT JULIO JAUREGUI, PNV LEADER AND BASQUE REPRESENTATIVE IN GOS-OPPOSITION TALKS, WAS PROMISED BY GOS PRESIDENT SUAREZ, IN PRESENCE OF WITNESSES INCLUDING PSOE SECGEN FELIPE GONZALEZ, THAT ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS WOULD BE FREED BY ABERRI EGUNA. GOS FAILURE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THIS, LIKE LAST-MINUTE GOS REVERSAL ON PERMISSION FOR JANUARY 16 BASQUE MAYORS' SUMMIT AT ETCHARRI ARANAZ (NAVARRA) FOR REASONS VERY SIMILAR TO ABERRI EGUNA REFUSAL, IS DESTROYING CREDIBILITY OF PNV AND OTHERS ADVOCATING NEGOTIATION WITH GOS. WITH MORE THAN 50 BASQUES STILL IN PRISON, PNV LEADERS FELT BASQUES WOULD PROBABLY WITHDRAW FROM NEGOTIATING COMMISSION, WHICH IN FACT HAS LITTLE MORE REAL WORK TO DO, NOTWITHSTANDING PRESS REPORTS QUOTING JAUREGUI AS DENYING INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM COMMISSION. UNLIKE OTHER BASQUE PARTIES, PNV HAS NOT MADE TOTAL AMNESTY A PRECONDITION FOR PARTICIPATING IN ELECTIONS. RATHER, IT HAS SAID A TOTAL AMNESTY IS ESSENTIAL TO BRING PEACE TO THE BASQUE COUNTRY. PNV WILL CLEARLY USE ANY SHORTFALL IN THE AMNESTY AS A STICK TO BEAT THE GOVERNMENT WITH IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN.

4. ALTHOUGH THE PNV LEADERS SPLIT THE BLAME FOR ABERRI
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EGUNA STRIFE BETWEEN DELIBERATELY PROVOCATIVE LEFTIST EXTREMISTS AND HEAVY-HANDED GOS CONSTABULARY, THEY OF COURSE AWARDED THE LATTER THE LION'S SHARE. AS AN EXAMPLE OF THEIR ABILITY TO KEEP THINGS UNDER CONTROL IN THE ABSENCE OF POLICE, THEY CITED THE SUCCESSFUL PNV HANDLING OF SOME 200 MEMBERS OF EIA (POLITICAL GROUP CONTAINING FORMER ETA TERRORISTS) WHO OPENLY DISPLAYED PISTOLS WHEN THEY TRIED TO JOIN THE APPROXIMATELY 25,000 PNV DEMONSTRATORS IN LOYOLA, PNV'S ABERRI EGUNA FALLBACK SITE. THEY CONTRASTED THIS WITH SUCH POLICE ACTIONS AS SHOOTING A BELGIAN CAMERAMAN IN VITORIA WITH RUBBER BULLETS AND FRACTURING THE SKULL OF A NONPARTICIPANT IN DURANGO. IN KEEPING WITH THE CONTINUING CLIMATE OF TENSION AND VIOLENCE, ARZALLUS REPORTED THAT HE REGULARLY RECEIVES DEATH THREATS.

5. AS A FOOTNOTE, THE PNV LEADERS WERE CRITICAL OF THE LOCAL PRESS FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CHANGE OF VENUE TO LOYOLA, AND FOR LATER CHARACTERIZING THE PARTY

REPRESENTATIVES THERE AS MEMBERS OF THE PNV "MODERATE" OR "RIGHT" WING (INSULTING WORDS IN THE BASQUE POLITICAL LEXICON). WHILE ADMITTING THAT DIFFERENCES EXIST AMONG GROUPS WITHIN THE PARTY, THEY SAID THAT THESE ARE DEFINED BY POSITIONS ON BASQUE CULTURE RATHER THAN QUESTIONS OF ECONOMICS OR PARTY TACTICS.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: SINCE AMCONSUL BILBAO DRAFTED THIS CABLE, PNV REP JAUREGUI HAS INDEED QUIT THE OPPOSITION "COMMITTEE OF NINE" AND THE PNV HAS TAKEN A SOMEWHAT HARSHER LINE WITH THE GOVT, NONE OF WHICH IS SURPRISING IN THE WAKE OF THE ABERRI EGUNA PROHIBITION AND THE CONTINUED INCARCERATION OF A NUMBER OF BASQUE "POLITICIAL" PRISONERS. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THE GOVT BANNED THE ABERRI EGUNA CELEBRATION NOT BECAUSE OF ITS OPPOSITION TO MANIFESTATIONS OF THIS SORT, BUT BECAUSE IT HAD DECIDED TO LEGALIZE THE PCE AND DID NOT WANT TO TAKE THE CHANCE OF FURTHER EXACERBATING CONSER-
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VATIVE REACTION TO THE EASTER-EVE LEGALIZATION ANNOUNCEMENT AS THE RESULT OF POSSIBLE PUBLIC ORDER DISTURBANCES IN VITORIA ON EASTER SUNDAY.

7. AS FOR THE PRISONER RELEASE ISSUE, WE TOO ARE AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN WHY THE ASTUTE SUAREZ WOULD HAVE PROMISED, OR APPEARED TO PROMISE, SOMETHING WHICH HE MUST HAVE RECOGNIZED AT THE TIME WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DELIVER. RELEASES, HOWEVER, HAVE CONTINUED, AND THERE IS SOME SPECULATION (SEPTTEL) THAT THE "SECOND STAGE" OF THE AMNESTY -- I.E., THE CASE-BY-CASE REVIEW OF THOSE STILL IN JAIL -- MAY BEGIN SOON. STABLER

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